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ABSTRACT

There exists today a wider gulf than ever before between higher education and the public it is designed to serve and this gulf is widening. Public support for higher education is decreasing at a time when the cry for universal higher education has been taken up by the public and university community alike. One of the major causes for this widening rift is that for too long some basic premises of higher education have remained unexamined. These include the premise: (1) that voluntary accreditation is necessary and that it should be controlled by the institutions being accredited; (2) that this country needs a dual-track system of higher education; (3) that the university has no accountability to the public as to its efficiency and effectiveness; and (4) that there are certain educational verities such as the value of liberal arts, boundless academic freedom, and ever increasing needs for more space and more buildings. A new political synthesis is needed, a social contract in which university and college goals are defined through a process of political accommodation to the conflicting wishes of their varied constituencies. (AF)

ED 046359

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Academic Change and Counter-Change

EXACTLY a month ago today, in response to a gentle reminder from Kay Andersen, I holed up in my study to gather in a moderately coherent form the ideas which I had been hoarding for this address. You can imagine my dismay when I uncovered, in my notes, the title to which I had committed myself via long-distance telephone nearly two months earlier. What either of us was thinking about when I proposed and Kay accepted the title "Academic Change and Counter-Change" must go the way of Robert Browning's "Sordello." Only God and Robert knew what the poem meant, and the latter forgot even before his demise.

Nor shall I attempt to twist the title, in homilitic fashion, to force it into the theme of this conference. Let's just forget it altogether; for it is precisely the theme of our conference to which I would like to address myself today. Not that I can match the thought or eloquence of your two other major speakers, one of whom I have heard and admired on many occasions in the past, but because I think the theme is particularly appropriate at this moment in the history of higher education and of our country.

Despite its slight ambiguity, I would hold with the program committee the belief that higher education and the public have a mutual responsibility to one another. What's good for General Motors, to borrow a particularly unfortunate phrase of yesteryear, is indeed good for the country and vice versa. And in the ideal configuration each would recognize its interdependence and would work hand in hand for the welfare of all. The lion would lie down with the lamb, God's in his heaven, all's for the best in this best of all possible worlds, etc., etc. The public is not adequately supportive of the best interests of higher education, however, and higher education is not adequately concerned with or supportive of the public interest. Neither, in fact, particularly understands nor trusts the other.

As a result there exists today a wider gulf between higher education and the public it is designed to serve than has existed before in the memory of anyone in this room. The gulf is widening, and across the land is heard, not the voice of the turtle, but the mournful plaint of many a college dean and president, in Hamletian terms,

> The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!

It will be my contention in this paper that a major cause of this widening rift is that we are boggled by our own unexamined premises,

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many of which have all the reality of an old Irish myth. The public on its side has its preconceived myths, its own unrealistic predilections about higher education; and we, on ours, harbor a simply incredible number of ill conceived notions about ourselves and our public. And unless and until these are examined in the cold light of reality, neither is likely to understand, let alone meet, the legitimate (or even illegitimate) needs of the other.

But before I launch into my tirade and say some things which I would never have dared say while still president of a California State College, it might be useful to consider for a moment just what the public interest is and who is to define it. These are by no means easy queries which our program committee has posed for us. If John Galbraith is to be believed (and who amongst us would question his Olympian utterances?), the idea that the public actually determines what its best interests are is itself little more than a myth. In a highly industrial society the individual is told what he wants and then sold on the idea that he wants it. Because he has virtually no choice anyway, he accepts in reasonable contentment. In matters of higher education we the scholars and administrators have for the most part been exercising this kind of thought control for generations. We are understandably dismayed, therefore, when, as seems to be occurring now, the consumers of our product are telling us that they don't like what we have to offer. In our bewilderment over this turn of events our confidence in our long standing convictions about what is for the public interest has been shaken. In our concern with our own prerogative we tend far too often to ignore the public interest altogether. Recently, for example, I spent several days at the Wingspread conference center in Wisconsin deliberating with a small group of administrators, scholars, and students on a topic highly reminiscent of ours today—"The Contribution of the Church -Related College to the Public Good." As our collective wisdom was rising, at the end of the third day, to its brilliant culmination, one of the student conferees, who had participated largely through his silence, could stand it no longer and threw the meeting into a tailspin by observing, quietly but indisputably, "I have been hearing a great deal for the past several days about the church-related college, but I haven't heard a single word about the public good." I am relieved that our WCA conference is so different.

I suggest, though, that we have suddenly discovered we are no longer at the heart of a national endeavor and, as John Gardner observed as long ago as 1961, we find ourselves "swimming upstream against the interests of a public that thinks everything else more urgent." The hue and cry is for a reordering of national priorities as regards the place where education now finds itself. Without for a moment questioning the urgency of some such exercise, I believe that any reordering must begin with a cooperative reexamination of some of our major premises and a willing abandonment of our more destructive myths.

Since I am now speaking to my fellow academicians rather than to the public which we purportedly serve, I shall focus attention principally upon those of our own academic premises which most sorely need reexamination; but first, and to provide something of a backdrop, I want

to look at one or two sharply contrasting preconceptions which seem now to be dominating public policy as regards higher education.

Next October, the theme for the annual meeting of the American Council on Education will have to do with the implications of universal higher education. The basic premise is the quite accurate one that the American public (obviously following the lead of the sovereign state of California) insists that every American youth be offered the opportunity for education as far beyond the secondary-school level as his ambitions will carry him. The predictions call for 80% by the year 1976. Since, for the vast majority, taking advantage of this policy one or two additional years will satisfy their thirst, the fiscal emphasis now and in the years immediately ahead is likely to be upon the community college and upon vocational training. Though some in this audience might quarrel with such an emphasis, I can assure you that its desirability is widely shared by those in positions of fiscal power. But as for this demand for universal higher education, I would earnestly hope that the ACE programmers will provide opportunity seriously to confront the question of whether education beyond secondary school for everyone is really in the public interest, whether a new conceptualization of sub-collegiate education would not be much more to the point, and whether "education" should perhaps be reserved for our colleges and "training" turned largely over to the consumer industries, which I suspect could provide it much more efficiently and at far less cost.

To give the present administration in Washington its due, let me add that some of these questions are beginning to be raised. From both public and private observations, it would appear that we are properly moving into a period when what we have been doing educationally at all levels is to be subjected to the kinds of public evaluation which we in the profession have for the most part failed to provide on our own initiative. And if we can avoid throwing the baby out with the bath water, this kind of scrutiny cannot help being for the long range good.

We nevertheless seem at present to be firmly committed to the idea of universal higher education. Well over a decade ago Henry Heald, anticipating the effects of this trend, made the following observation:

> The college or university today is not an island of culture in an intellectual wasteland, not a monastic retreat for bearded scholars, not a training ground for an educated elite, not a country club for a privileged few.
>
> Our colleges and universities have become servants of the people and ministers to the public welfare. Our nation has come to the point where every field of human endeavor, where, indeed, our progress and survival, depend upon educated people.

What he could scarcely have anticipated, however, is the present state of the public, even the official, mind in which this change in the posture of our institutions of higher education is at best not recognized and at worst denied altogether. Most of us are still cast in an elitist mold and as such are viewed with suspicion by the populace. Thus, while denied our former role as keepers of the national religion, we are still charged with the responsibility of administering the tribal puberty rites!

But a relatively new and even more dangerous premise has crept into the philosophical portfolio of many of our state and federal leaders, who can be presumed to reflect popular opinion. It is the reversal of the time-honored belief that higher education is for the public interest and therefore both merits and requires public support. The new view is that higher education primarily benefits the individual and that therefore it is the individual, or the private sector, which should bear the cost. If I could I would immediately add some warming word to counteract the cold chill which should at this moment be coursing your spinal track. The effects of this philosophical reversal can be serious for tax-supported higher education. They are potentially catastrophic for private higher education.

What is more, there is some evidence, if we view "benefits" in our usually materialistic terms, that higher education may not even have the financial benefits for the individual which we have always assumed. Recent studies suggest that the liberal arts degree, even some professional degrees, are not the highroad to health and happiness, fame and fortune which we have been led to believe; that public moneys earmarked for the public welfare may produce better results when not allocated to higher education. Moreover, recent activities on our campuses have tended to confirm in the public mind the suspicions raised by some of our societal analysts. Thus, two years ago Dr. Manning Pattillo, president of the Foundation Center, declared:

> Higher education stands to lose in two ways if it does not deal successfully with the problem of extremism. First, public confidence in higher education, already shaken by recent events, will be increasingly undermined, with a consequent decline in financial support; and second, the social climate in our country will be such that academic institutions will be seriously handicapped in carrying on their work. They have a large stake in freedom. In the last thirty years they may unwittingly have done more to weaken our free society than to strengthen it. It is time to reverse the trend. This, in my opinion, is the most urgent task facing both higher education and foundations today.

Now, two years later, although campus violence may have subsided somewhat, I am sure he would see few signs that the trend has been reversed. Our institutions seem on the point of reaping the grim harvest.

I do not propose for a moment that anyone is about to write off higher education as an institution or even as a way of life. At the same time, I am not overly confident that institutions as such have much capacity for self reform. Despite this mild skepticism, I intend to devote my remaining moments with you today in discussing a few of our own time honored premises which either we must reexamine or which will be reexamined for us. Unless we can find ways to reform them, or conversely to defend them, we shall at the very least have lost an important initiative.

Since major functions of the Western College Association are voluntary accrediting and evaluation, it is appropriate that I start first with the premises that voluntary accreditation is necessary and that it should be controlled by the institutions being accredited.

May I assume that a few of you at least have heard of an obstreperous

Washington neighbor of mine named Marjorie? Her last name is Webster. Like Madame Lafarge she has made the mighty tremble. And, frankly, we had it coming. But we have yet more coming if we blandly assume that our accrediting activities, which for the most part are now accountable only to our colleges and universities, will so remain unless we take careful stock of our premises and practices and then fight together to preserve our hegemony. Many of us thought that when the National Commission on Accrediting was established our troubles were over. Effective as that organization has been, it would appear as if our troubles may be only at the beginning. Judge Smith's decision, if sustained, can virtually destroy our efforts to provide at least a modicum of fraternal self disciplining for our member institutions; and the moment we have this voluntary power removed from our hands, a vast array of governmental agencies, state and federal, will be ready and eager to step in.

On the surface the issue would appear to involve merely the subpremise, a false one in my opinion, that no proprietary, profit-making institution can provide an education of acceptable quality. But this is a vast oversimplification. It will increasingly be challenged. What is wrong with accreditation as now practiced is that entirely too much depends upon entirely too casual a procedure based upon almost entirely untested standards. If Dr. Sandy Astin's projected study should demonstrate, as some preliminary evidence now suggests it might, that accrediting standards may well be largely irrelevant and that a student will achieve approximately the same amount academically regardless of the number of Ph.D.'s on the faculty, the number of books in the library, or the numbers on the SAT profiles of his fellow students — if this should be even tentatively demonstrated, then, my friends, not only is accreditation in serious trouble but so are the colleges and universities which provide its voluntary support. Thanks to the initiative of the National Commission on Accrediting and the Association of American Colleges, a national study of accreditation, to complement the self-study recently initiated by FRACHE is getting under way. But we are already dangerously late.

I WOULD now turn from this topic to discuss another of our cherished premises, not in any way to try to destroy it but to suggest that the time is overdue for us to come to its defense. I refer to the belief which I have always accepted, quite uncritically, that this country needs a dual-track system of higher education. The wealth of authoritative support which one could muster for this point of view is as glittering as it is impressive. Harold Dodds summed up the argument neatly over twenty years ago when he said, at a Princeton commencement exercise:

> The only way we can protect ourselves from a position in which the majority does our educational thinking for us, *nemine dissentiente,* is by maintaining in full and vigorous health the independent college and university. Jefferson said that representative government must not only tolerate but encourage minorities, and this is as true in education as in politics.

But the patent truth of a situation does not necessarily, even in a democracy, contribute to its wide acceptance. This particular truth is not even

accepted by all of us in positions of academic leadership, with the result that some in the private and public sectors not only eye each other with distrust but, one suspects at times, would shed few tears at the other's demise. Perhaps it is a strength of American higher education, as it allegedly is of the English, that everyone has someone to look down on. Things are looking up for us to be looking down. For, as against the traditional dual track, we now in a sense have three tracks, with a fourth looming just over the horizon. Once it was just the private degree-granting college against the public. Now we have that flamboyant youngster, the community college, and soon we may well have the industry-sponsored degree and non-degree granting institutes in significant numbers.

All of these are, or soon will be, competing vigorously for the dollar, from any and every source. In the old American tradition how can we say that competition is not a healthy manifestation, at least so long as we enjoy a virtually unlimited market? The trouble is that our money market has become anything but unlimited for higher education; and if I read the signs aright, its stringencies are likely to increase. The proposed federal budget for 1971 hurts all of us equally, even though admittedly a few of us are hurt a little more equally. The difference between privately and publicly supported institutions, which difference has long been edging toward the fictional, is growing even less relevant. Instead, therefore, of making unsupportable claims of vast qualitative differences, the time is here for us to admit our commonality and work together in pursuit of our mutual interests — in the belief that these are the public's interests as well.

The economics and the politics of the situation are so obvious as to make of their iteration a redundancy. As you may read in the appendices of a recent study prepared for the CCHE, a certain well known private university in the East, a few years back, requested x millions from the state government to keep it operating. The money was not forthcoming and the state had to take the institution over. As a result the taxpayers are now annually paying x plus y plus z millions to support this university, and every dollar which goes to it is a dollar not available to the other tax-supported institutions in that state. A relatively modest investment of tax dollars to preserve a viable system of private higher education can mean not less but more tax dollars for the existing publicly-supported colleges and universities.

Some leaders in private higher education feel that they mount a fairly persuasive argument. If the storehouse were indeed unlimited I might agree. But from my soundings — and I now speak only of the federal scene — a separatist approach, particularly for the exclusive support of private undergraduate education, would be absolutely fatal. To divide is to be conquered, which in this instance means that even our present inadequate support for all would stand to be further dissipated.

Back in 1955 — another generation, another era — Arthur Coons, whom so many of us here can remember with affection and admiration, wrote an article for the *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* entitled "Is There a War between Public and Private Colleges?" It is one of the finest statements ever made on this subject. Its reasoning is as valid today

as it was fifteen years ago. In commending the article to you, I cannot help quoting from its final paragraph:

> It should not be forgotten that there are strong as well as weak public as there are strong as well as weak private institutions. There is a need for all of them. Someone has characterized our American system of higher education as the most magnificent as well as the most inclusive in the world. The task of all of us is to obtain the resources to keep the several parts of that system progressively more strong, more effective and more promising as contributors to our pluralistic culture so that all the streams within American life may have opportunity for expression for the good of all. There is no magic device for holding all of these fruits of our culture except by paying for them — by taxes, or by tuition or by gifts.

And he might have added, for this was explicit in his article, that none of these sources is any longer the exclusive province of any single type of institution.

THE move to my next premise is not nearly so distant as it might seem, nor will I dwell on it at length. In his article on "Myths of College Administration" Eldon Johnson repeated the observation that "a college nowadays has no trouble being successful, but it has increasing difficulty being significant." Although this is an appealing caveat, if we think of success in either managerial or fiscal terms, I suggest that a large percentage of our institutions nowadays are finding success a very evanescent goal indeed. Some of my former faculty colleagues believed quite sincerely that the public should supply the funds we say we need and then keep its hands strictly off. But this, to put it mildly, is a wholly unrealistic expectation. The public has a right to expect us to be efficient as well as effective custodians.

I used to have an old Rotary Club speech, when I was still in the saddle, which developed the theme that a college was a business. Confidentially, I was always a little fearful that word of it might get back to the campus, where, of course, everyone knows that a college is not a business: it is a community of scholars earnestly pursuing the truth. Yet if Alvin Eurich is correct and if we continue to operate along conventional lines, "we would need to construct more college facilities in the next fifteen years than we have built in all our history." Is there anyone who in his wildest dreams envisions this kind of public or private support?

Thus the problem has two other dimensions, if we think in business terms — and believe me, we'd better! First, every other major business or industry in our American economy, along with its increasing gross costs of operation, has voluntarily increased its productivity or gone into bankruptcy. It has achieved this enlarged output by a variety of means, including a vast commitment to R & D, the development of new techniques, and the adoption of new instrumentation. Higher education too can boast of some research and development in teaching and learning, and new devices have become available to us. We can even lay claim to some academic innovation, as summarized by Michael Brick and Earl McGrath in a recent publication of the Institute of Higher Education. We are, nevertheless,

the only major industry in our country whose costs have risen while productivity has declined. This is a fact which the profession as a whole seems almost totally to ignore. Yet as any earnest reader of the *Congressional Record* can tell you, it has not escaped the notice of those who determine priorities in the allocation of federal funds.

Another dimension to this problem is reflected in a statement issued a few years back by Paul H. Davis: to wit, "the time distinguished scholars waste in being amateur administrators surpasses belief." Someday I may well make a speech on this subject; but today is not the time, you will be relieved to know. We must acknowledge, though, that many of our college and university administrators have advanced only a step beyond amateur standing. The burning question is thus how long can we expect the kind of fiscal support we think we need unless we are able to demonstrate that the management of our affairs bears some comparability with that of the American businesses with which we may soon be competing for the educational dollar. And as both students and faculty increasingly demand their share in administrative decision-making, we move ever closer to the old caution about an excess of cooks in the kitchen.

Although the range of premises which we could profitably examine today is virtually unlimited, our time together obviously is not. Under the circumstances I will take up only one more premise in this my final section.

WHEN we fall ill and consult our physician, we instinctively see him as a kind of God image and accede to his judgment and skill without question. Higher education is ill. We are the specialists. But the public, which includes our students, and which, along with them, must rely on us for a vast array of services, is beginning to doubt our experience. Therefore, if there are, as I am sure you and I would agree, certain educational verities, the time is ripe for them to prove themselves.

One of the verities, certainly, is the value of the liberal arts. Yet we know that our brighter students in increasing numbers question that either we or the liberal arts have much to say of real significance. No less a personage than the Vice President of the United States recently dismissed the liberal arts as merely an "elegant ornament" — which should gain us some belated student support. But, except for Braden and Mankiewiz, I have not heard any loud nays from an outraged populace. Are we really, under present configurations, producing by some strange alchemy liberally educated men and women? Have we been blandly assuming that an uncritical constituency will continue to accept our word? You and I both know the answers.

Another educational verity by which we seem to operate is that academic freedom is boundless — this in the face of mounting evidence that the public patience with its abuses does indeed know some bounds. Before leaving California several months ago I had heard many people, in their concern for what had been happening on the Fresno campus and elsewhere, use the expression, "I believe in academic freedom, but . . ." At times, frankly, I have felt the same kind of wavering in my orthodoxy.

I would feel somewhat more confident, I think, if academic freedom

had to be earned, in much the same manner as permanent and continuous tenure, the traditional justification for which is its essentiality as a safeguard for freedom. Instead, and without any definitive or widely accepted set of ground rules for academic responsibility, we accord all the rights and privileges to the greenest of unsupervised teaching assistants who may or may not have any understanding of or dedication to the pursuit of truth, without which dedication academic freedom is superfluous. Because there is so little evidence that aberrant behavior is dealt with meaningfully within the confraternity, we run some risk of having our cherished assumption about academic freedom and tenure questioned out of existence by those who are now viewing us with skepticism and alarm.

There is a bit of irony around my part of the country which holds that if we could demonstrate that higher education is polluting the air we could get unlimited federal support. But pollution is any kind of waste, and I wonder how much pollution *we* may be guilty of. A little bird has told me that the University of California is to have no new buildings until the present plant receives a vastly higher utilization. Whether true or not, I'm afraid all of our colleges and universities have been guilty from time to time of building buildings to avoid forcing students and faculty into admittedly less desirable hours but where there could be little or no deleterious effect upon learning.

Nor indeed have we as a service institution seriously looked at our traditional time patterns. Can we justify preempting two or four, six or ten or twelve years out of a student's life in order for him to earn his union cards? To what extent is our inflexibility educationally defensible, or does it merely represent a desire for self preservation narrowly conceived?

Instead of building more walls, literally or figuratively, I wonder why we don't remove every wall that cannot be buttressed by solidly defended intellectual designs – if I may slightly scramble a metaphor. A reversion to the peripatetic pedagogy might be a way of deflating architectural costs and inflating academic returns. We certainly will continue to need libraries, scientific laboratories, and faculty offices. I'd even go along with student unions and study carrells. But it seems to me that we are morally obligated to seek new configurations toward greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The hard truth is that there is not, in the immediate future at least, any *deus ex machina* in Washington. Unpalatable as it may be, therefore, we are about to be spurred on by the art of our necessities.

In my remarks today I have, perhaps regrettably, tended to emphasize the fiscal implications of our many unexamined premises and presumed verities. At the back of my mind, for example, was the absurdity of having those in administrative responsibility worrying night and day about financial survival while so many of the professoriat are busying themselves about salaries and working hours, and while the more aggressive students seek to take over both administration and instruction. This has gone to such an extreme that recently a group of striking high school students demanded a committee of students and faculty to meet daily and make all the administrative decisions. Moreover, they expected to be paid for doing so.

In a brilliant talk at the recent meeting of the Association of American Colleges, President Bloustein of Bennington College called for a "new academic social contract." He sees this as the need for a new political synthesis, and I quote:

> A sense of the college or university as defining its goals through a process of political accommodation of the conflicting wishes of its varied constituencies; a college president representative of the full range of interests embodied in the institution; a president freed from commitment to dominant social, political and moral values and capable of personal and emotional identification with his student constituents; a structure of governance which admits students, faculty and trustees into political participation but defines the role of each in terms of its special interests and competencies; and resources sufficient to meet basic needs. These are the grounds on which a new academic social contract can flourish. These are the grounds which can help to restore the bonds of sympathy and admiration, the shared expectations, hopes, fears and faith which support the exercise of authority. These are the grounds which can restore academic order and insure academic freedom by legitimating academic authority.

Implicit in this proposed social contract, of course, is the earnest call for a new kind of management. The college president, in his desperate search for fiscal and social stability, has been distracted from maintaining his overall leadership; but he must take the helm if the institution's survival is to be in terms of significant service to society at large. The faculty in its concern with its prerogatives is too inclined to ignore the needs of the whole. The students, at least the more articulate ones, frighten us because of their excess of imagination and their inevitable deficiencies in experience and wisdom. Our salvation will not be found on some outer planet, even if that planet is the Nation's Capitol. It has to come from a critical reexamination of our premises, this to be undertaken on each and every campus that together constitute the universe of higher education. And it will come when our presidential and administrative leaders resume their rightful place at the center of the academic enterprise.

A stern admonition that I can freely offer now I am no longer a college president!